



Involving the community in a changing coastline: an English case study

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Effective engagement: a common challenge

Waterfront engagement often involves:

- history of protection and development
- climate change pressures
- lack of appropriate skills and experience
- political involvement
- technical meets the emotional

Learning as we go...

Case study: Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy

- partnership with local councils
- review of coastal management practices every 10 years
- address flood and erosion risks to 5,300 properties, infrastructure, business + farmland in area
- management proposals over 100-year timescale
- highlight funding realities

Learning from the southern coast of England



Strategy must address a changing coastline

- existing defences at low standard of protection
 - limited funding
 - no justification for maintaining over 100 years
 - sea level rise, increased storminess + subsidence
 - flood/erosion risks to properties + critical infrastructure
- = proposals call for adaptive approach including managed realignment at Medmerry

Case study: Medmerry, West Sussex



Strategy proposed
England's first
managed
realignment on
open coast



Coastal Defence Strategy initial consultation

90-day consultation (Nov 2006 – Feb 2007)

- project team included engineers from local councils
- comments invited from 20,000 permanent residents + seasonal visitors
- consultation document with 'preferred options'
- exhibitions + feedback form
- media work and website

Met legal requirement but was poorly received.

Initial consultation: started well but quickly turned contentious

Community rejected proposals

- angry residents / businesses
- demand more time = extended consultation period
- new pressure group + public meetings
- doubt our evidence, e.g. economics
- perception of 'birds over people'
- lack of political support from planning authority

'Fight them on the beaches!!!'

Project team took stock: what went wrong?

- x no real objectives meant inability to evaluate progress
- x draft proposals with no warm-up engagement
- x perceived lack of empathy + 'us v. them' mentality
- x engineers not elected officials
- x neglected local knowledge
- x shied away from community resistance

Lack of support resulted in a lame duck strategy.

If at first you don't succeed...

New approach with a revised engagement plan:

- ✓ measurable objectives: why do we? why do they?
- ✓ stakeholder analysis: inclusive and transparent
- ✓ 'what it means for you': plain English and relevant
- ✓ tailored activities + clear responsibilities
- ✓ establish common ground with pressure group: we all want communities safe from flooding / erosion
- ✓ ongoing relationships: not just for 90 days
- ✓ build and demonstrate trust

Second round: draft strategy consultation (Summer 2008)

- consultation document clarifying areas of influence, restrictions
- series of exhibitions and workshops
- 1:1 meetings
- mailers + seasonal engagement
- Council presentations



***Pagham to East Head Coastal
Defence Strategy draft proposals
Engagement plan***

Draft strategy consultation risk areas

(from UK Environment Agency's consultation document)

Figure 1.2 - Strategy extent with flood and erosion risk



Tailored engagement at Medmerry

- first managed realignment of its kind
- technically challenging + strong opinions
- opportunity to turn pressure group into collaborative working or liaison group:
 - ✓ clarity on when/what could be influenced
 - ✓ involved decision-makers + influencers
 - ✓ facilitated to avoid 'us v. them' dynamic
 - ✓ collaborative agenda design, work plan + timetable
 - ✓ transparency through shared communications

The Medmerry Stakeholder Advisory Group (MStAG)



- project team proposed liaison group – could not decide in isolation
- initial large meeting with many groups to identify community representatives
- facilitation support
- collaborative terms of reference + membership



All agreed: a community working group must be driven by the community!

Positive response to second consultation



- 1,000 people attended exhibitions + workshops
- discussion of future changes to coastline
- newsletter mailer summarizing feedback, next steps
- ongoing dialogue with MStAG

Revised engagement turned things around

It was... 'fight on the beaches'

- × thousands of complaints, No.10 petition, public meetings, Council opposition

It became... overwhelming community support

- ✓ understanding and acceptance, unanimous Councillor support, and zero complaints

'Everyone is now working together, and the Environment Agency is no longer seen as an enemy.'

– Cllr Connor, Chichester District Council

Results: a strategy that could be delivered

- ✓ General community support for strategy.
- ✓ Local planning authority supportive of schemes.
- ✓ Improved relationships with community groups.
- ✓ Agreed ways of working for future.
- ✓ Community involved in coastal adaptation.

Next steps: ongoing engagement during Medmerry scheme delivery

- challenge traditional scheme approach + seek community involvement
- old objectives and outcomes no longer apply
- focus on transparency + share plan with community
- clarity on level of influence:

What stakeholders could influence	What stakeholders could not influence
Location and design of banks (within technical constraints)	Strategic recommendation for managed realignment
Emergency access through the site, footpath routes and other recreational enhancements	Timing for the design, planning and construction process
Construction access routes and use of site before and during construction	Location of the breach in the shingle bank and whether this is allowed to occur naturally or man-made
Planning decisions	The standard of protection that the new banks will provide
Funding from other sources for recreational and habitat enhancements	Coastal processes, currents and geology impacting on the design
Decisions about drainage	Total flood risk management budget available

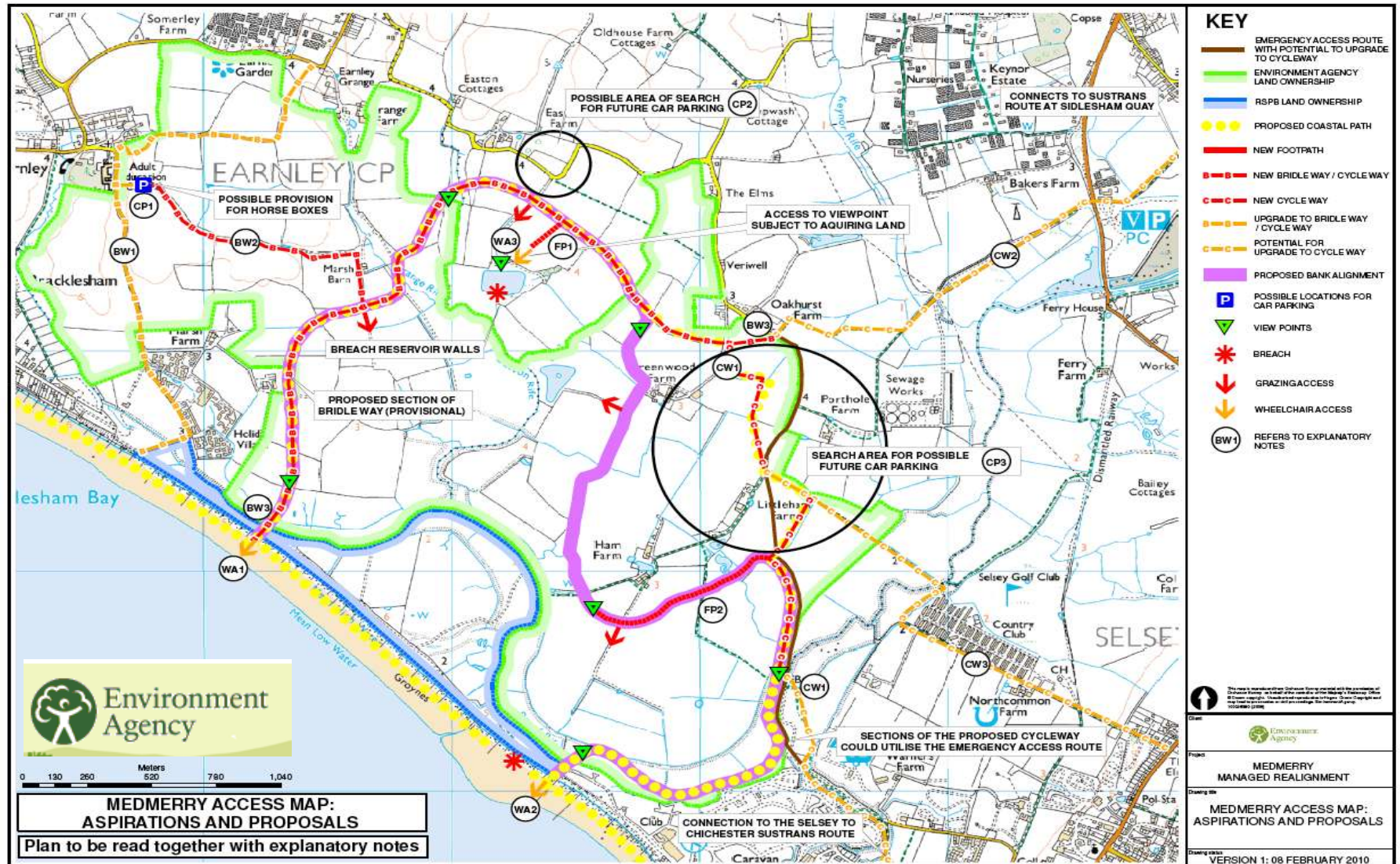
Figure 1: Table of influence derived from the *Medmerry summary stakeholder engagement plan* (Environment Agency, 2010)

MStAG engagement continued

Regular meetings during scheme design

- engagement alongside tight timetable
- ensure design reflects local knowledge, e.g. drainage
- seek opportunities for community enhancements, earlier rather than later
- partnership approach to streamline implementation
- co-host public exhibitions + online updates
- support community initiatives, e.g. green tourism

Local input regarding scheme design



MStAG collaboration = results

- ✓ Final scheme design reflected local knowledge + concerns.
- ✓ Achieved community understanding and support.
- ✓ Provided evidence for local planning authority.
- ✓ Likely objections identified and addressed.
- ✓ Effective working relationships for the future.

Medmerry: what's happening now?

- received planning approval, construction underway
- continue to work with MStAG during construction + breach
- regular meetings / newsletters to discuss progress
- seek to incorporate community recreational and habitat aspirations into scheme implementation wherever possible

More information available online:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

An aerial photograph of a coastal landscape. The foreground shows a wide, sandy beach with gentle waves lapping at the shore. Behind the beach is a large area of agricultural fields, divided into various sized plots by dark lines representing roads or fences. The fields are in shades of brown and tan, suggesting a dry or autumnal season. In the distance, a body of water is visible under a pale, overcast sky. The overall tone of the image is muted and somewhat desaturated.

Learning as we go...

Lessons learned from initial consultation through scheme design

- ✓ We should have involved communities from the start of the strategy review process.
- ✓ Our technical timetable needed to be integrated with our engagement plan.
- ✓ In the beginning the project team lacked the necessary expertise, time and resources for true engagement.
- ✓ Throughout the process we needed to be clear and open about what was / wasn't up for influence.
- ✓ We sometimes failed to value relationships and local knowledge.
- ✓ Evaluation was only possible when we had honest and measurable objectives.

Levels of participation

(from UK Environment Agency's Working with Others toolkit)



*Least influence / control
over decision*

*Greatest number
of people*

Inform: provide information / announce a decision

Gather information: understand people's views, request feedback, includes formal consultation

Involve: dialogue on issues with opportunity for real influence, final decision remains with organizing body

Share decision making: people work as partners sharing discussion, negotiation, and final decision

*Greatest influence /
control over decision*

*Least number
of people*

A few helpful rules to make your next engagement exercise effective

- Early engagement is essential.
- Be inclusive and adopt a cross-sector approach.
- Engagement must be meaningful for those involved.
- Communicate clearly and honestly.
- Ask how others want to be engaged and plan for change.
- There is always something to influence.

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape, showing a grid of agricultural fields and a road. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

Thank you.

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communications

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